



RRB News

U.S. Railroad Retirement Board

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Benefit Rate Increase for Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Benefits

The maximum daily benefit rate payable for claims under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act increases to \$57 from \$56 in the new benefit year, which begins July 1, 2006. Benefits are normally paid for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over four in 14-day registration periods, so maximum benefits for biweekly claims will total \$570.

During the first 14-day claim period in a benefit year, benefits are payable for each day of unemployment or sickness in excess of seven, rather than four, which, in effect, provides a one-week waiting period. Initial sickness claims must also begin with four consecutive days of sickness. However, only one waiting period is required during any period of continuing unemployment or sickness, even if that period continues into a subsequent benefit year. Claimants already on the rolls will, therefore, normally not be required to serve another waiting period because of the onset of the new benefit year.

To qualify for normal railroad unemployment or sickness benefits, an employee must have had railroad earnings of at least \$2,875 in calendar year 2005, not counting more than \$1,150 for any month. Those who were first employed in the rail industry in 2005 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in 2005.

Under certain conditions, employees with 10 or more years of service, who do not qualify in the new benefit year on the basis of their 2005 earnings, may still be able to receive benefits after June 30, 2006. Ten-year employees who received normal benefits in the benefit year ending June 30, 2006, might still be eligible for extended benefits, and 10-year employees may be eligible for accelerated benefits if they have rail earnings of at least \$2,987.50 in 2006, not counting earnings of more than \$1,195 a month.

(More)

Application forms for unemployment and sickness benefits may be obtained from railroad employers, railroad labor organizations, any Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) office, or the agency's Web site at www.rrb.gov. Also, as an alternative to applying for unemployment benefits through the mail, unemployment claimants can instead file applications online through the RRB's Web site. Likewise, subsequent biweekly claims for unemployment benefits may be filed online rather than through the mail and employees can access information about their individual railroad unemployment insurance account statements via the Internet. These account statements provide a summary of the unemployment and sickness benefits paid under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act to rail employees.

To access these services, employees must first get a PIN/Password and then establish an RRB Internet Services account. To do this, employees should click on "Benefit Online Services (MainLine)" and then click on the "Create an account" link for directions on establishing an RRB Internet Services account. At that time, to ensure security, employees must apply for a Password Request Code, which they will receive by mail in about 7 to 10 days. Once they establish their online accounts, they will be able to file their applications and biweekly claims for unemployment benefits as well as conduct other business with the RRB over the Internet. Employees are encouraged to initiate an online account while still employed so the account is established if they ever need to use these or other select RRB Internet services. Employees who have already established online accounts do not need to do so again.

Although claimants cannot currently file applications or biweekly claims for railroad sickness benefits over the Internet, the RRB is planning to add the online filing of sickness claims in the future.

Claimants with questions about unemployment or sickness benefits should contact the nearest RRB office. Most RRB offices are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays.

Claimants can find the address and phone number of the RRB office serving their area, and also get information about their claims and benefit payments, by calling the toll-free RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772. The RRB Help Line is an automated telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Field office locations can also be found on the RRB's Web site.